



*Draft Environmental Assessment
for the*

**Walter E. Hoffman
United States Courthouse
Proposed Courthouse Annex
Norfolk, Virginia**



Responsible Agency:

**General Services Administration
Region 3**

April 2006



1 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This document, together with its appendices and incorporation by reference, constitutes an Environmental Assessment (EA) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended. NEPA establishes national policies and goals for the protection of the environment and establishes a process to ensure that the environmental consequences of such actions are adequately addressed.

The assessment as documented herein will be made available for public review and comment for a period not less than 30 days. The EA will become final provided that no information leading to a contrary finding is received or comes to light during the period afforded for public review and comment.

1.2 BACKGROUND

The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) is proposing to construct an annex to the existing Walter E. Hoffman U.S. Courthouse in Norfolk, Virginia (Figure 1-1). The project calls for the design and construction of an approximately 177,000 gross square foot (gsf) building, plus 71 indoor parking spaces, and a sallyport for prisoner movement. The new facility would consolidate the District Court, court units, and court-related agencies into a courthouse facility that will accommodate the 30-year space requirements of the Courts and court-related agencies.

At present, the District Court has nine judges utilizing seven courtrooms. Bankruptcy court has two judges and two courtrooms. Of the nine total courtrooms, several do not meet the minimum size requirements of the *U.S. Courts Design Guide*. Five of the nine courtrooms are assigned to district judges, two to magistrate judges and two to bankruptcy judges.

Federal Court Space in Norfolk

The existing Walter E. Hoffman United States Courthouse, located at 600 Granby Street, was constructed between 1932 and 1934 to house the U.S. Post Office, the U.S. District Court and all federal agencies in Norfolk (Figure 1-2). In 1984, the building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It contains a gross building area of 216,790 gsf and 130,745 usable square feet (usf) of floor space. The building currently houses the U.S. District Courts and Clerk's Office, the U.S. Bankruptcy Court and Clerk's Office, U.S. Probation Office, Circuit Library, U.S. Marshals Service (USMS); and the U.S. Attorney Suite (Trial/Witness Preparation and Grand Jury Coordinator only).

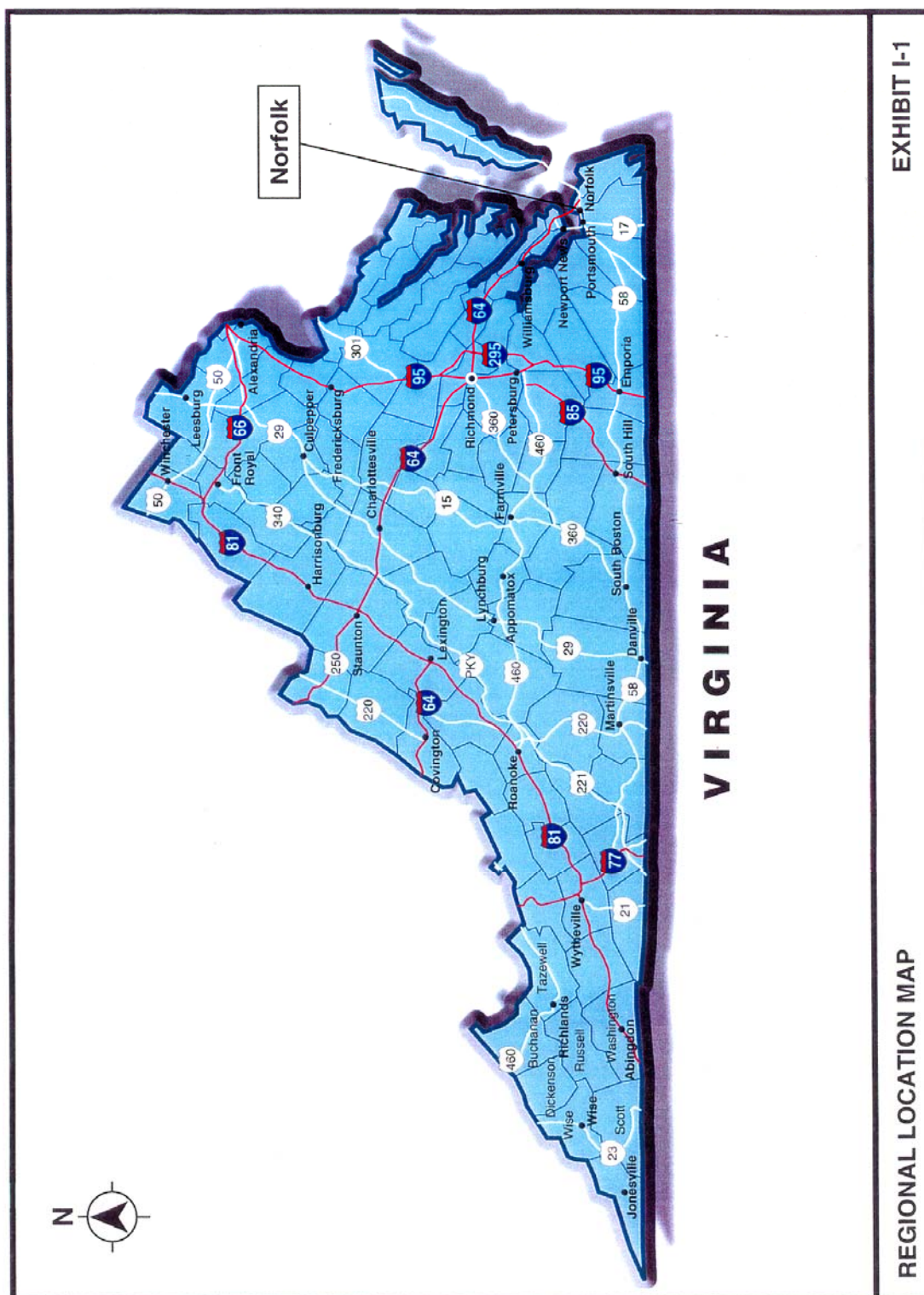


Figure 1-1: Regional Location Map

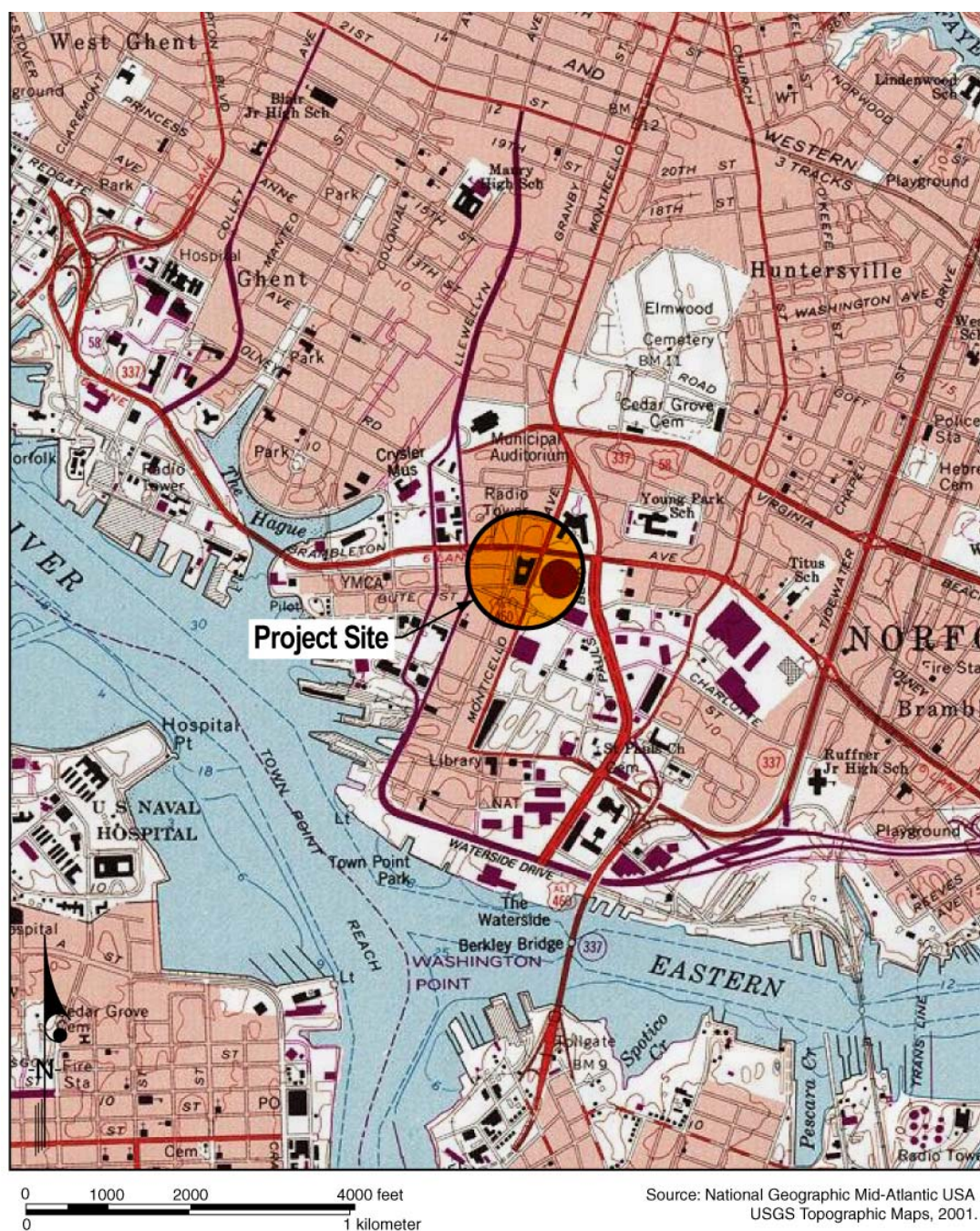


Figure 1-2: Site Location – Existing Courthouse

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The purpose of the proposed action is to:

- create a courthouse facility that will accommodate the 30-year space requirements of the Courts and court-related agencies;
- maintain the court presence in Norfolk;

- adapt and reuse the existing Hoffman Courthouse building; and
- create a court complex that optimizes security, circulation, and operations.

The action consists of designing the new building to accommodate the security requirements of the U.S. District Court and would include three new District courtrooms, one new Magistrate courtroom, one new Bankruptcy courtroom and program space for the U.S. Marshals Service, U.S. Probation Office, U.S. Pretrial Services Office, U.S. Attorneys Office, and U.S. Trustees Office. The 71 indoor parking spaces would be provided for Judges, the U.S. Marshals Service, and court related personnel and handicapped employees. Upon completion of construction, the courthouse and annex would provide 14 courtrooms for 5 District Judges, 3 Senior District Judges, 3 Magistrate Judges and 3 Bankruptcy Judges.

In addition, the existing courthouse would undergo a series of proposed design alterations, which include:

- upgrading the current constant-volume heating and air conditioning, electrical, plumbing, and security systems;
- installing an upgraded fire and sprinkler system throughout the building;
- installing additional elevators;
- reconfiguring some of the interior space to better accommodate court components;
- performing interior and exterior historic restoration;
- cleaning the exterior of the building; and
- repairing the roof.

The resulting courthouse facility, which would meet the design criteria of the U.S. Courts Design Guide, will support the efficient operation of the Courts for decades.

There are currently five sites under consideration by GSA for development of the proposed project. These alternatives are discussed further in Section 2.2.

1.4 NEED FOR THE ACTION

The Courthouse Annex is needed to:

- Provide for increased security; and
- Consolidate the operation of the courts and court related services thereby lowering costs and increasing operating efficiency.

The existing Hoffman Courthouse does not provide adequate security. The courthouse represents an adaptation of a building designed in a different era to the security concerns of

today's courthouses. At the time of its completion in 1934, there was little provision for the separation of circulation between public, private and secure uses other than in the area of the building originally designed for use by the U.S. Post Office. The original mixed use of the building, with the Post Office on the ground floor and the courts and federal agencies above, was the defining criterion for the circulation system. The most pressing need today is for a secure corridor system for prisoner movements. At present, the public, jurors, trial participants and judicial officers share the same elevators and hallways. The U.S. Marshals Service (USMS) must unload prisoners in the north parking lot used for judges parking and walk them directly into USMS space.

The existing Hoffman Courthouse contains approximately 120,000 net occupiable square feet (NOSF) (Davidson, 2006). There is an estimated existing space shortfall of approximately 99,000 occupiable square feet (OSF). By 2015, space projections for the U.S. Courts and court-related agencies in Norfolk more than double to approximately 229,500 NOSF (Table 1-2).

Currently, there are four active and two senior district judges, two magistrate judges, and two bankruptcy judges seated in Norfolk. The courts have projected a requirement for one new active and one new senior district judgeship, one new magistrate judgeship, and one new bankruptcy judgeship by 2015. Support services for the courts are also expected to grow, with an increase in the number of deputy clerks projected for both the District Court and the Bankruptcy Court. Other court-related agencies have future expansion requirements as well. Table 1-1 details the current courtrooms, as well as the future requirements upon which this project is based. Table 1-2 summarizes total program space upon the project's completion.

Table 1-1: Space Requirements for the U.S. Courts

Court	Current		Projected, Year 2015	
	Courtroom	Judges	Courtrooms	Judges
District	5	6*	8	8
Magistrate	2	2	3	3
Bankruptcy	2	2	3	3
Total	9	11	14	14

* includes two senior judges; ^ includes three senior judges
Source: General Services Administration, 2006.

Table 1-2: Summary of Total Post-Construction Occupiable Area

Tenant	Net Occupiable Square Feet
<i>U.S. District Court and Clerk</i>	
U.S. District Court - Courtset	51,614
U.S. District Court Judge - Chambers	20,132
U.S. District Court Magistrate Judge-Courtset	14,584
U.S. District Court Magistrate Judge-Chambers	5,096
U.S. District Court Clerk	17,420
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>108,846</i>
<i>U.S. Bankruptcy Court and Clerk</i>	
U.S. Bankruptcy Court – Courtset	12,277
U.S. Bankruptcy Court – Chambers	6,602
U.S. Bankruptcy Court Clerk	16,628
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>35,507</i>
Jury Assembly	4,161
Grand Jury Room	1,388
Alternative Dispute Resolution	1,482
Joint Use Court Facilities	4,593
Probation/Pretrial Services	25,991
Circuit Satellite Library	6,076
U.S. Attorneys’ Trial Prep Suite	1,800
U.S. Trustees Office	5,945
U.S. Marshals Service	24,869
Federal Public Defender	796
GSA / Joint Use Building Support	8,075
<i>Total</i>	<i>229,528</i>

Source: General Services Administration, 2004

1.5 SCOPING

In accordance with the NEPA, a scoping process was conducted to aid in determining the scope of issues to be addressed and to identify the significant issues related to this action.

The CEQ defines scoping as an early and open process for determining the significant issues related to the proposed action (40 CFR 1501.7). Scoping is usually the first direct contact between proponents of a proposed action and the public. Scoping is an ongoing process that occurs during planning for preparation of an environmental document, and may consist of meetings, telephone conversations, and written comments. It has the following specific, but limited objectives:

- to identify the affected public or agency concerns;
- to facilitate an efficient environmental document preparation process through assembling cooperating agencies, assigning data collection and analysis tasks, and scheduling appropriate reviews;

- to define the issues and alternatives that will be examined in detail in the environmental document while simultaneously devoting less attention and time to issues which cause no concern; and
- to save time in the overall process by helping to ensure that the environmental document adequately addresses relevant issues.

GSA is conducting consultation with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR) as part of the project in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. In compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, GSA has also requested and received information from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation regarding any known threatened or endangered species within the project area. Correspondence can be found in Appendix A.

A scoping meeting took place on January 10, 2006, at Kirn Public Library. The meeting was announced in The Virginian-Pilot on January 1, 2006 and January 8, 2006. Attendees were informed about the details of the Proposed Action, the application of NEPA in the project development project, and the scoping process. In addition, a public meeting took place on November 14, 2005, to obtain public comment and input regarding the potential impact on historic properties in relation to the proposed annex of the Walter E. Hoffman United States Courthouse.

Appendix B includes a summary of all comments received during the scoping process.

1.6 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS, PROCEDURES, AND SCHEDULE

NEPA is intended to help public officials make decisions based on an understanding of environmental consequences, and to take actions that protect, restore, and enhance the environment. Decisions should be made based on accurate scientific analysis, expert agency comments, and public scrutiny of readily available environmental information. Federal agencies are obligated to follow the provisions of NEPA to identify and assess reasonable alternatives to the proposed action that will avoid or minimize any adverse effects upon the quality of the human environment before proceeding with the proposed action.

The level of NEPA analysis undertaken by an agency for a proposed action depends on the probable impacts.

In order to determine the level of NEPA analysis to be performed, GSA examined potential impacts on the natural and human environment. The impacts considered were based on reasonably foreseeable changes resulting from implementation of the proposed action. Issues that could affect the environment and/or the proposed project were identified, including:

- potential impacts to the natural environment including floodplains;
- compatibility with surrounding land uses and visual effects on surrounding areas;

- potential impacts to archaeological resources;
- potential impacts to historic resources; and
- effects of the development on transportation facilities and traffic.

Based on a review of these issues and because significant impacts are not anticipated, GSA elected to prepare an EA for the site selection and construction of the Courthouse Annex. This EA takes a hard look at the probable impacts based on the reasonably foreseeable consequences of the proposed action and recommends measures to mitigate impacts, as appropriate.